



Indiana State Department of Health

FACT SHEET: Lead

What is lead?

- Lead is a bluish-gray metal that has no special taste or smell.
- Lead is often used in products such as paint and water pipes because it makes products more durable and helps keep things from corroding.
- Lead is especially common in homes built prior to 1978.

How can I reduce my child's exposure to lead?

- Lead can be found in drinking water. Make it a habit to:
 - Use cold water for drinking and cooking and let it run for 30 seconds to flush your pipes of lead.
 - Contact IDEM's Drinking Water Branch at (800) 451-6027 and ask for extension 308-3308 to learn more about lead in your drinking water.
- Lead can be found in homes built before 1978, especially prior to 1950, so assume the paint contains lead. Make it a habit to:
 - Wash all areas around doors and windows monthly with detergent and water. Lead dust near these areas is especially harmful because it enters the child's body and passes through the bloodstream at a much faster rate than ingesting the paint chips.
 - Remove flaking, peeling paint in your home because it might have lead. Contact your county health department for tips on how to remove the paint.
 - Avoid sanding lead-based paint. If you need to prep peeling areas, scrape them (while using a mist of water to avoid creating more dust) and remember to use a drop cloth to catch paint chips.
 - Clean your carpets every year. Wet cleaning is especially recommended, but make sure the carpets are completely dry to avoid a possible mold problem.
 - Change your clothes and shoes before coming inside your home if you work around lead or have a hobby that involves lead.
- Lead can be found in the soil from both peeling paint chips that fall from a house and past use of leaded gasoline. Exhaust from lead gasoline settled onto roadways in urban areas and rainwater caused the lead to runoff and settle into the ground. Make it a habit to:
 - Remove surface soil if it's contaminated with paint chips.
 - Wipe shoes on a doormat or remove them before entering the house to help keep lead out of the house.
 - Encourage children to play in mulched or grassy areas instead of dirt that is near peeling paint areas such as walls, fences and sheds.

- Wash children's hands or encourage children to wash their hands, especially before eating. Many health problems can be avoided by taking this simple step.

How can lead affect me and my family's health?

- Lead can affect almost every organ and system in your body. The most sensitive to lead poisoning is the central nervous system, but lead can also affect the respiratory system, the reproductive system and the circulatory system.
- Exposure to lead is more dangerous for young and unborn children. Unborn children can be exposed to lead through their mothers. Harmful effects include premature births, low birth weight, decreased mental ability in the infant, learning difficulties and reduced growth in young children.
- Exposure to lead in toddlers and pre-school aged children is also a serious concern because of hand-to-mouth activities and playing on floors. Children age six and younger are the most vulnerable to lead poisoning, which can lead to behavioral and learning problems.
- Exposure to high levels of lead for adults may decrease reaction time, cause weakness in fingers, wrists or ankles and possibly affect memory. Lead may cause high blood pressure, anemia (a disorder of the blood) and expectant mothers to abort unborn children. It may also damage the male reproductive system. The connection between these effects and exposure to low levels of lead is uncertain.

Is there a medical test to determine whether I have been exposed to lead?

Yes, call your local health department or your physician for more information about this test. The Indiana Department of Health recommends that children have this test by age two.

Where can I get more information?

Indiana Department of Environmental Management
Children's Environmental Health Coordinator
100 N. Senate Ave. IGCN Room 1301
Indianapolis, IN 46204
(317) 233-5628
(800) 451-6027 ext. 35628

Indiana State Department of Health
Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
2 N. Meridian Street, Section 3-D
Indianapolis, IN 46204
(317) 233-7808